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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2403, TFLE01: LARSEN TO PROPOSE HANDOVER OF ISRAELI

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BEIRUT2403	2006-07-17 11:49	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy Beirut

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 002403

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2016
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SUBJECT: TFLE01: LARSEN TO PROPOSE HANDOVER OF ISRAELI SOLDIERS TO GOL; JUMBLATT AND HAMADEH CONCUR

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C/NF) On July 16, the Ambassador and econoff had a late night meeting with UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen and UNSYG Personal Representative to Lebanon Geir Pederson. Larsen showed a draft proposal to the Ambassador, which Larsen said that he was drawing from orally but not providing to GOL officials. It started with calling for Hizballah to transfer custody of the two Israeli soldiers it is holding to the GOL under the auspices of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, and then transfer them to Israel. This would be followed by a multi-step plan that would result in a cease-fire, a buffer zone in southern Lebanon policed by the Lebanese military, and a UNSC resolution calling for the full implementation of UNSC 1559. Larsen did not expect Hizballah to accept the proposal but its rejection would paint it in a corner. Larsen and Pederson met with Siniora and Speaker Berri that day, and they seemed open to the idea. Mid-way through the meeting, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, Telecoms Minister Marwan Hamadeh, and Information Minister Ghazi Aridi arrived unannounced. Jumblatt liked Larsen's idea. While expressing deep concern about some of the Israeli targeting, Jumblatt and Hamadeh expressed their hope that Israel would continue its military operations until Hizballah's military infrastructure was seriously damaged even if it meant a ground invasion into southern Lebanon. Jumblatt said that publicly he must call for a cease-fire, but he saw the fighting as an opportunity to defeat Hizballah. After Jumblatt and company departed, Larsen said he agreed that an Israeli invasion might be positive. Pederson added that Hizballah called him several times on July 16, and seemed desperate for mediation. End summary.

LARSEN SHARES DRAFT PLAN WITH AMBASSADOR

¶2. (C/NF) On July 16, the Ambassador and econoff met UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen and UNSYG Personal Representative to Lebanon Geir Pederson at Larsen's suite at the Phoenicia Hotel. Pederson excused himself early to return to the other part of the UN delegation (Ambassadors Nambiar and Ambassador De Soto) so as to not arouse suspicion about Larsen-U.S. collusion. Meanwhile, Larsen showed the Ambassador a draft plan to de-escalate the fighting in Lebanon step by step. He made it clear that he would not leave a copy of the draft with the Lebanese but would draw from its ideas in his discussions. While Larsen did not allow us to keep a copy, we took notes. Its main elements follow:

Element One: Ask the Prime Minister and Speaker to support a statement by the UN on July 17 to call for Hizballah to hand over the two Israeli soldiers it is holding to the custody of the GOL under the auspices of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The Red Cross will be allowed to visit the soldiers. Next, an understanding between Israel and Lebanon with the following conditions: a) transfer of the two Israeli soldiers to Israel, and Israel releases the two Lebanese citizens still in its prisons, followed by a non-mandatory "lull" in the fighting, b) creation of a buffer zone to extend 20 km north of the Blue Line, c) the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) deploy into the buffer zone, and d) Siniora sends a letter to the SYG and UNSC stating that the GOL, in spite of its reservations, will respect the Blue Line in its entirety until agreements are made.

Element Two: The UNSC passes a resolution with the following attributes: a) condemns Hizballah's violation of the Blue Line, b) calls for an immediate and safe return of the two Israeli soldiers, c) deplores the lack of progress in implementing UNSC 1559, d) condemns the targeting of civilian infrastructure, e) deplores loss of civilian life and reminds

Israel of its responsibility to protect civilians, f) deplores the disproportionate use of force by Israel, g) calls for immediate cessation of military operations and the full implementation of UNSC 1559, and h) reminds neighboring states of their obligation not to interfere in Lebanon's affairs.

Mechanisms: The models under consideration include three options: a) a council of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, U.S., France, Britain, Russia, and the EU, or b) option A with the

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addition of pro-Syria states like Iran and Qatar, or c) a council of neutral countries like Switzerland, New Zealand, and Norway. Ideally, Israel and Lebanon could sit on the council, but this is unlikely to happen.

Comprehensive Deal: Israel ceases all military operations and withdraws all its forces from Lebanese territory. The GOL deploys the LAF to southern Lebanon and ensures that no "armed elements" attack Israel. The LAF deployment to the south must have enough forces to "maintain respect along the Blue Line." UNIFIL would verify compliance.

Follow-up: The GOL, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Arab League organize a Taif II conference. The Arab League announces that it sanctions a Taif II. Israel returns to the conditions of the 1949 armistice agreement with Lebanon.

3, (C/NF) Larsen explained that he and Pederson had met with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on July 16 and received a positive response from Siniora and a non-negative response from Berri for the basic concepts. He interpreted Berri's lack of negativity as quiet interest restrained by the need to keep his constituency happy. Larsen said that he knew that Berri was planning to meet with Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah on the night of July 16. Berri was focused on "grabbing the opportunity" now or else the situation will spiral out of control, according Larsen. Larsen said that he had an excellent brainstorming session with Siniora regarding his draft proposal. Larsen said that his mediation will focus only on Siniora and Berri in order to avoid confusing the matter by including the "naive-ists" Michel Aoun and Saad Hariri. Larsen planned to meet with Berri and Siniora on July 17.

¶4. (C/NF) Larsen continued that he was working to derail Javier Solana's efforts. "Solana is an embarrassment." Larsen explained that Berri had told him that Solana had brought a German Ambassador with him with the intention of hostage negotiations like those that freed Elhian Tannebaum and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers in 2004 in exchange for hundreds of Arab prisoners. Siniora was equally skeptical. The Ambassador called Adviser to the Prime Minister Mohammad Chattah, who confirmed that Siniora had told Solana that his initiative was dead in the water.

SETTING A TRAP FOR HIZBALLAH;
JUMBLATT AND HAMADEH AGREE

¶5. (C/NF) Larsen agreed that Hizballah would most likely reject his plan. This would be not be a problem because then the Arab countries, possibly including Qatar, would be pressured to come on board. Hizballah would look like the party that is denying an opportunity for a cease-fire.

¶6. (C/NF) Mid-way through the meeting three visitors arrived at Larsen's room unannounced. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh, and Minister of Information Ghazi Aridi entered the room in good humor and indulged in generous orders to room service with the others present. The three Lebanese politicians reacted positively to Larsen's proposal to call for a transfer of the Israeli soldiers to the GOL. They said it would be best for Larsen to hold his press conference at 1500 hrs. local on

July 17 before the cabinet is scheduled to meet at 1700 hrs. local. This would give momentum to the proposal and an opportunity for the cabinet to endorse it. Hamadeh assessed that Hizballah would be a loser either way. If Hizballah rejected the Larsen proposal, then it would be blamed for the continued destruction of Lebanon. If Hizballah accepted, then March 14 could say what did Hizballah bring all this destruction to Lebanon for, if to just return the Israeli soldiers.

INVADE MY COUNTRY

¶7. (C/NF) Over a glass of red wine, a large bottle of vodka (the quality of which sparked a long exchange between Jumblatt and the startled room service waiter), and three bottles of Corona beer, Jumblatt gave a briefing on the thinking of the March 14 coalition which had met that evening. Jumblatt noted the heavy destruction of Lebanese infrastructure but bemoaned the irony that Hizballah's

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military infrastructure had not been seriously touched. Jumblatt explained that although March 14 must call for a cease-fire in public, it is hoping that Israel continues its military operations until it destroys Hizballah's military capabilities. "If there is a cease-fire now, Hizballah wins," said Jumblatt. "We don't want it to stop," Hamadeh chimed in. Hizballah has been stockpiling arms for years and its arsenal is well-hidden and protected somewhere in the Biqa Valley. Jumblatt marveled at the cleverness of the Iranians in supplying Hizballah with the anti-ship missile that hit an Israeli gunboat.

¶8. (C/NF) Responding to Jumblatt's complain that Israel is hitting targets that hurt the GOL while leaving Hizballah strategically strong, the Ambassador asked Jumblatt what Israel should do to cause serious damage to Hizballah. Jumblatt replied that Israel is still in the mindset of fighting classic battles with Arab armies. "You can't win this kind of war with zero dead," he said. Jumblatt finally said what he meant; Israel will have to invade southern Lebanon. Israel must be careful to avoid massacres, but it should clear Hizballah out of southern Lebanon. Then the LAF can replace the IDF once a cease-fire is reached. A defeat of Hizballah by Israel would be a defeat of Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon, Hamadeh added. For emphasis, Jumblatt said that the only two outcomes are total defeat or total success for Hizballah.

¶9. (C/NF) Hamadeh said that an Israeli invasion would give Siniora more ammunition to deal with Hizballah's arms. Jumblatt thought the crisis could end in an armistice agreement like after the 1973 war. A buffer zone in the south could then be created. However, Jumblatt added, Israel should not bomb Syria because it would simply bring Syria back into the Arab fold without damaging the regime in Damascus. Weaken Syria by weakening Hizballah, he counseled; don't make Syria a hero of the Arab world. Jumblatt made it clear he approved with Israel's scrupulous avoidance of direct military action against Syria.

INVASION ON THE TABLE

¶10. (C/NF) After finishing their room service, Jumblatt and company departed. Pederson, now back at the meeting said he thought Israel might launch a ground incursion into southern Lebanon. Larsen agreed, noting that much could be achieved if Israel invades southern Lebanon. "No one wants the status quo ante," said Larsen. Pederson sensed Hizballah was getting nervous. "They called me several times today; they seem desperate," Pederson said.

COMMENT

¶11. (C/NF) Jumblatt's comments echoed those of other March 14 contacts. Like the Israelis, they see the status quo ante as not an appealing destination. Thus, they also privately share their belief that a cease-fire now would leave Hizballah's capabilities largely intact, with Nasrallah stronger and March 14 even weaker. But they fret that Israel's stated aims of weakening Hizballah, while theoretically attractive, is not in fact happening. Marwan Hamadeh commented bitterly that al-Manar television is still broadcasting, while infrastructure under "March 14" control, like the fixed telephone network, has been seriously damaged.

FELTMAN